

■ Book Reviews

The Defense of Hill 781

By
LTC James R.
McDonough

Reviewed by
Col. Fredrick
Van Horn

This book gives us an excellent opportunity to study the role of the command sergeant major in

combat and the proper relationship between commander and CSM.

In *The Defense of Hill 781*, LTC James R. McDonough gives us an entertaining opportunity to reflect on important lessons learned at the National Training Center. Inspired by Ernest Swinton's classic study in tactics, *The Defense of Duffer's Drift*, McDonough carries us through the battles of the NTC in the company of a battalion task force commander named LTC A. Tack Always and the task force command sergeant major, CSM Hope.

Getting to the National Training Center is easy for most commanders. Not so for Always. This hard-charging, airborne ranger, light infantryman dies from an overdose of MREs and ends up in Purgatory (the National Training Center) because of his lack of respect for "legs," staff "pukes," and other "heavy" members of the combined arms team. Always must successfully make his way through all NTC required battles as the commander of a heavy task force before he can earn his way out of Purgatory/NTC.

The first person Always meets is his task force command sergeant major, CSM Hope. Hope is "heaven sent" to guide Always through his NTC trials. In their all-important first meeting, Hope establishes himself as experienced, competent, dependable and straightforward. He wastes no time giving Always his assessment of the mission and the state of the battalion. He also establishes himself as an effective champion of the soldiers of the task force. The senior officer and noncommissioned officer of the battalion enter the battle with a good feeling about each other and full understanding of each others' strengths and weaknesses, thanks to Hope's professional handling of the first meeting.

During the battle, Hope provides timely advice, keeps Always abreast of the state of the task force, enforces standards, serves as trouble shooter in the commander's absence, and moves through the battalion raising morale wherever he goes. The author does a good job describing Hope's performance of these duties and in doing so demonstrates a clear understanding of why we have and need the command sergeant major: "A commander is human, and as a

human, he is limited. He cannot shoulder the entire burden by himself. He needs others to help him, to pick up where his energies run out, when he cannot be there . . . He can command — but he needs others to make his command effective."

This book should be in every noncommissioned officer's library. Having read it once, it is the kind of book you go back to over and over again to study the role, duties, and responsibilities of the noncommissioned officer in combat. ■

No Name on the Bullet: A Biography of Audie Murphy

By Don Graham.

Reviewed by
Marijean Murray

In this well-researched look at an American hero, Graham also introduces us to a very human figure.

Graham uses interviews with Murphy's friends and family and quotes from the soldiers and war correspondents who knew him to find the man behind the headlines. He also draws upon Murphy's memoir, *To Hell and Back*, and from magazines and news reports to explore the more public figure that Murphy became.

Murphy's life has all the ingredients of a classic American success story. Born into a Texas sharecropper's family, Audie was put to work in the cotton fields by the time he was five years old.

He completed only five years of school, but those who knew him say he had a fierce drive to better himself. His family's poverty and the loss he felt when his father deserted them seemed only to increase his need to achieve.

When the United States declared war in 1941, Murphy wanted to enlist immediately, but he had to wait until his 18th birthday in 1942. After basic training he was assigned to the 15th Infantry Regiment, Third Infantry Division and saw his first combat in Sicily in July 1943.

He quickly proved to be a valuable infantryman. From the start, he aggressively took and held ground, and returned fire with a vengeance. Murphy's ability to read natural terrain, perfected when he had hunted as a child, frequently saved

his life and those of his fellow soldiers.

At Cisterna, the battle lasted more than three days. Fewer than 30 men in his unit survived, and Murphy was the only noncommissioned officer left. As a result of these losses, and because of his demonstrated leadership, Murphy took over as platoon leader.

Combat didn't get easier when the division landed in southern France, although by then Murphy's exploits were well publicized. He amassed medals for bravery at a fast rate, but at the Colmar Pocket in January 1945 he was credited with single-handedly saving his company.

Graham quotes three eyewitnesses who describe Murphy's desperate stand atop a burning tank destroyer, exposed to enemy fire, firing the tank's machine gun at the advancing Germans. For this one act of heroism he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

As the war's most decorated soldier, Murphy became a celebrity, appearing on the cover of *Life Magazine* and receiving offers from Hollywood.

Graham's portrayal of Murphy's life in Hollywood — looking at both his successes and his personal and professional problems — is drawn from extensive interviews and public records.

Murphy died in a plane crash in 1971, and is perhaps best remembered for his first-hand account of the war, *To Hell and Back*, written with the help of reporter David McClure. Describing that book, Murphy once said, "I do not believe in heroics. The great man of the war to me was the little fellow who did what was asked of him and paid whatever price that action cost." ■